(b) Export statistics in respect of steel items for the year 2003-04 and April-July, 2004 are given in the table below:

(Value in Rs. lakhs)

Commodity Name	Value of Export 2003-04	to Pakistan during April-July 2004
Ferro Alloys	866.34	248.00
Iron & Steel Bars/Rods	192.80	119.00
Primary & Semi-finished Iron & Steel	2274.15	409.00
TOTAL:	3333.29	776.00

Source: Engineering Export Promotion Council

There has been a visible increase in business to business dialogue through exchange of visits and participation in trade fairs/exhibitions etc. India and Pakistan are signatories to the South Asia Free Trade Area (SAFTA) Agreement and it is expected to give a significant boost to the economic activities between the two nations. Commerce & Industry Minister participated in the 4th SAARC Commerce Ministers Meeting in Islamabad from 22-23 November, 2004. The Meeting noted with satisfaction the significant progress recorded in regional economic cooperation, in particular, the signing of the SAFTA Agreement. On this occasion, Commerce Ministers of India and Pakistan also had a separate interaction to lay down a road map for promoting trade between the two countries. They agreed to set up a Joint Study Group at the level of Commerce Secretaries of both the countries for evolving a strategy for boosting trade and economic cooperation between India and Pakistan.

Allocation of quota for import of oil

997. SHRIMATI BIMBA RAIKAR: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether India's top edible oil companies use oil imported by the State Trading Corporation under the Annual Preferential Import Quota;

(b) whether the Director General of Foreign Trade (DGFT) allocates quota for import of oil to the agencies;

(c) whether the DGFT had short-circuited the process of equitable allocation of the quota by allocating the entire quota to STC; and

(d) if so, the details thereof

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (b) Yes, sir.

(c) and (d) 1,50,000 M.Ts of Crude Sunflower seed or safflower oil or fractions thereof was available under Tariff Rate Quota (TRQ) for 2004-05. As per recommendation of Exim Facilitation Committee (Inter-Departmental Committee constituted in DGFT), 1,44,000 M.Ts was initially allocated to State Trading Corporation of India Ltd (STC) and 6000 M.Ts to National Agricultural Cooperative Marketing Federation of India Limited (NAFED). Thereafter, as per the order dated 01.10.2004 of High Court of Delhi, and in supersession of previous allocation 96207.00 M.Ts was reallocated to STC and 53793.00 M.Ts to NAFED in proportion to the quantity applied for by them for further distribution among the applicants who applied through them.

Patent Amendment Bill

998. SHRI MANOJ BHATTACHARYA: Will the Minister of COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government propose to modify the Patent Act during the Winter Session of Parliament;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) whether Government are aware that there are a lot of apprehensions in the domestic pharmaceutical and chemical sectors about the proposed amendment; and

(d) if so, the steps taken by Government to address those apprehensions?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF COMMERCE AND INDUSTRY (SHRI E.V.K.S. ELANGOVAN): (a) and (d) The Patents Act, 1970 is required to be amended, effective from January 01,2005 in order to introduce product patent regime for inventions in the fields of food, drug or medicines and substances produced by chemical processes in accordance with India's obligations under the Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS).

(c) and (d) Representations have been received from industry